

FEBRUARY 2026 DEVOTIONAL (FULL FORMATION EDITION)

ROOTED & RISING

28 Days of Spiritual Formation, Surrender & Maturity

St. James Missionary Baptist Church
The Year of Better: Back to the Basics



Dear St. James Family,

January taught us how to speak in faith.
February will teach us how to *live* in faith.

Spiritual growth does not happen by excitement alone—it happens through surrender, discipline, and daily obedience. This month's devotional is intentionally slower, deeper, and more reflective. You are invited not just to read, but to **abide, examine, and grow**.

As we focus on being **Rooted & Rising**, remember:
Roots grow in hidden places before fruit ever appears.

Stay faithful. God is working beneath the surface.

With expectation,
Pastor Jonathan & Lady Diane Lowder

WEEK 1 THEME

ROOTED BEFORE SEEN

God grows what He intends to sustain.

DAY 1 – ROOTED BEFORE RISING

Formation Statement

I choose depth with God over visibility before people.

Primary Scripture

 *Colossians 2:6–7*

Biblical Context

Paul writes to believers who are being pressured to “advance” spiritually through added rules, philosophies, and religious performance. He reminds them that **spiritual growth does not**

come from addition—it comes from continuation. The same way you received Christ is the same way you grow in Him.

Theological Truth

Spiritual maturity is not measured by how much you do for God, but by how deeply you remain connected to Him.

Pastoral Bridge (Then → Now)

We live in a culture that celebrates exposure, platforms, and quick results. But God values depth over display. Roots grow in hidden places before fruit ever appears. If God is slowing you down, it's not punishment—it's preparation.

Heart Examination

Am I more focused on being seen or being spiritually stable?

Spiritual Practice

Spend **10 minutes in silence** today—no phone, no music—simply acknowledging God's presence.

Guided Prayer

Lord, uproot anything shallow in me. I want depth, not applause. Grow me where no one sees so I can stand when everyone does. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What daily rhythm will help me stay rooted in Christ this month?

DAY 2 – ABIDING, NOT ACHIEVING

Formation Statement

I remain connected to Christ and release the pressure to perform.

Primary Scripture

 *John 15:4–5*

Biblical Context

Jesus speaks these words on the night before the cross. The disciples are anxious, confused, and fearful about what's coming. Instead of giving them strategy, Jesus gives them **relationship**: "Remain in Me."

Theological Truth

Fruit is not produced by striving—it is produced by staying connected.

Pastoral Bridge

Many believers are exhausted not because they are doing the wrong things, but because they are doing the right things disconnected from Christ. Abiding is choosing presence over pressure.

Heart Examination

Where have I replaced intimacy with activity?

Spiritual Practice

Pray **before planning** today. Invite God into your schedule before filling it.

Guided Prayer

Jesus, reconnect me where I've drifted. Teach me to rest in You instead of striving for results. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What helps me remain aware of God throughout the day?

DAY 3 – A HUNGER THAT SUSTAINS

Formation Statement

I cultivate a hunger for God's Word that nourishes my soul.

Primary Scripture

 *Matthew 4:4*

Biblical Context

Jesus speaks this in the wilderness while fasting. Satan tempts Him to satisfy legitimate hunger in an illegitimate way. Jesus responds by affirming that **physical sustenance alone cannot sustain spiritual identity**.

Theological Truth

God's Word sustains endurance, not just inspiration.

Pastoral Bridge

Entertainment feeds emotions, but Scripture feeds resilience. When pressure comes, what you've consumed spiritually determines how you respond emotionally.

Heart Examination

What do I turn to first when I feel depleted?

Spiritual Practice

Read today's scripture **aloud twice**, slowly and attentively.

Guided Prayer

Lord, retrain my appetite. Let Your Word become my daily nourishment. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

When and where will Scripture consistently fit into my daily routine?

DAY 4 – PRAYER THAT FORMS THE HEART

Formation Statement

I allow prayer to shape me before it changes my situation.

Primary Scripture

 *Luke 11:9–10*

Biblical Context

Jesus teaches persistence in prayer not because God is reluctant, but because prayer **forms dependence and trust**. The process matters as much as the outcome.

Theological Truth

Prayer aligns the heart before it moves the hand of God.

Pastoral Bridge

Prayer is not a tool to control outcomes—it is a relationship that reshapes desires. God often answers prayer by changing us first.

Heart Examination

Do I pray more for control or for alignment?

Spiritual Practice

Pray using the **ACTS model**: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.

Guided Prayer

God, align my heart as I pray. Shape my desires to reflect Yours. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

How can prayer become relational rather than routine for me?

DAY 5 – OBEDIENCE BEFORE EXPLANATION

Formation Statement

I obey God fully, even when understanding comes later.

Primary Scripture

 *1 Samuel 15:22*

Biblical Context

King Saul offers sacrifice instead of full obedience, revealing that partial obedience is still disobedience. God values surrender over religious activity.

Theological Truth

Delayed or selective obedience disrupts spiritual growth.

Pastoral Bridge

God often asks for obedience before clarity. Trust is revealed not by understanding everything—but by obeying anyway.

Heart Examination

Where have I been negotiating instead of obeying?

Spiritual Practice

Take **one step of obedience** you've been postponing.

Guided Prayer

Lord, I surrender my need to understand before I obey. I trust You. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What usually keeps me from immediate obedience?

DAY 6 – DISCIPLINE OVER DISTRACTION

Formation Statement

I choose spiritual discipline over cultural distraction.

Primary Scripture

 *1 Corinthians 9:27*

Biblical Context

Paul compares spiritual growth to athletic training. Discipline is not punishment—it is preparation for endurance and effectiveness.

Theological Truth

What you repeatedly practice eventually shapes what you desire.

Pastoral Bridge

Distraction rarely destroys faith outright—it weakens it slowly. Discipline protects focus and fuels growth.

Heart Examination

What consistently distracts me from spiritual focus?

Spiritual Practice

Fast from **one nonessential distraction** today.

Guided Prayer

God, discipline my desires and sharpen my focus. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What boundary do I need to strengthen spiritually?

DAY 7 – HOLY REST

Formation Statement

I honor God by resting in Him.

Primary Scripture

 *Matthew 11:28*

Biblical Context

Jesus invites the weary into rest, not escape. Rest in Scripture is about **trust**, not inactivity.

Theological Truth

Rest declares that God is in control even when we stop working.

Pastoral Bridge

Burnout is not a badge of honor. God never intended for His people to live constantly drained. Rest is an act of faith.

Heart Examination

What keeps me from resting fully in God?

Spiritual Practice

Schedule intentional rest today—without guilt.

Guided Prayer

Lord, restore my soul as I rest in You. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

How will I protect rest as a spiritual priority?

WEEK TWO THEME

FORMED BEFORE FRUITFUL

Who you are becoming matters more than what you are producing.

DAY 8 – FAITHFUL IN THE SMALL

Formation Statement

I honor God by being faithful with what He has already placed in my hands.

Primary Scripture

 *Luke 16:10*

Biblical Context

Jesus teaches that faithfulness is revealed not in scale, but in stewardship. The kingdom principle is clear: **how you handle little reveals how you'll handle much.**

Theological Truth

God develops trustworthiness before He releases greater responsibility.

Pastoral Bridge

We often pray for “next,” while God watches how we treat “now.” Faithfulness in unseen places prepares us for visible assignments.

Heart Examination

Have I overlooked my current responsibilities while asking God for more?

Spiritual Practice

Do one ordinary task today with excellence and gratitude.

Guided Prayer

Lord, help me steward what You've already given me with faithfulness and joy. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What daily responsibility is God using to shape my character?

DAY 9 – STRENGTH FOR THE WAIT

Formation Statement

I trust God's work in seasons of waiting.

Primary Scripture

 *Isaiah 40:31*

Biblical Context

Isaiah speaks to a weary people tempted to believe God has forgotten them. He reminds them that **waiting on the Lord is not weakness—it is worshipful trust.**

Theological Truth

Waiting is an act of faith that invites divine renewal.

Pastoral Bridge

Waiting seasons are often where impatience is confronted and trust is refined. God strengthens us not just at the destination, but in the delay.

Heart Examination

What emotions surface in me when God doesn't move quickly?

Spiritual Practice

Replace one complaint today with a prayer of trust.

Guided Prayer

Lord, strengthen me as I wait. Teach me to trust You fully in this season. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

How can waiting become a place of growth instead of frustration?

DAY 10 – WALKING IN INTEGRITY

Formation Statement

I choose integrity as a daily spiritual discipline.

Primary Scripture

 *Proverbs 10:9*

Biblical Context

Wisdom literature consistently connects integrity with security. Integrity is not perfection—it is **wholeness**, where inner life and outer actions align.

Theological Truth

Integrity guards both character and witness.

Pastoral Bridge

A life of integrity doesn't mean we never fail—it means we refuse to live divided lives. God is honored when our private faith matches our public profession.

Heart Examination

Is there an area where my actions and beliefs are misaligned?

Spiritual Practice

Invite God to examine your heart honestly today.

Guided Prayer

Lord, align my heart, my words, and my actions with Your truth. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What boundary helps protect my integrity?

DAY 11 – TRUSTING GOD'S TIMING

Formation Statement

I release control and trust God's perfect timing.

Primary Scripture

 *Ecclesiastes 3:1*

Biblical Context

The Teacher reminds us that God operates in seasons. Life is not random—**timing is intentional in God's design.**

Theological Truth

God's timing reflects His wisdom, not His absence.

Pastoral Bridge

We often rush because we fear missing out. God slows us down because He sees what we cannot. Trusting God's timing is trusting His care.

Heart Examination

Where am I tempted to rush ahead of God?

Spiritual Practice

Pause before making decisions today—pray first.

Guided Prayer

Lord, help me rest in Your timing and trust Your wisdom. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

How can patience become a spiritual practice for me?

DAY 12 – CLOTHED IN HUMILITY

Formation Statement

I walk humbly with God and others.

Primary Scripture

 *James 4:10*

Biblical Context

James addresses believers struggling with pride and comparison. He reminds them that humility is the posture that invites God's grace.

Theological Truth

Humility positions us to receive what pride blocks.

Pastoral Bridge

Humility doesn't diminish you—it positions you. God lifts those who willingly lower themselves before Him.

Heart Examination

How do I respond when corrected or challenged?

Spiritual Practice

Practice listening more than speaking today.

Guided Prayer

Lord, shape my heart with humility and teachability. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What helps me remain humble and open to growth?

DAY 13 – SERVING WITH LOVE

Formation Statement

I serve others as an expression of Christ's love.

Primary Scripture

 *Galatians 5:13*

Biblical Context

Paul teaches that freedom in Christ is not license for self-focus, but opportunity for loving service.

Theological Truth

Service is love made visible.

Pastoral Bridge

True service flows from love, not obligation. When love motivates service, joy replaces resentment.

Heart Examination

Do I serve with joy or out of duty?

Spiritual Practice

Serve someone today without expectation or recognition.

Guided Prayer

Lord, help me serve with Your heart and humility. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

How does serving others shape my spiritual growth?

DAY 14 – LOVE THAT FORMS MATURITY

Formation Statement

I allow love to shape how I live and relate to others.

Primary Scripture

 *1 Corinthians 13:4–7*

Biblical Context

Paul reminds the church that spiritual gifts without love are empty. Love is not optional—it is essential to maturity.

Theological Truth

Love is the evidence of spiritual growth.

Pastoral Bridge

Knowledge impresses, but love transforms. As we grow deeper in Christ, love must grow wider in our relationships.

Heart Examination

Where is God calling me to grow in love?

Spiritual Practice

Choose patience and kindness intentionally today.

Guided Prayer

God, form my heart to love like You love. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

How can love guide my responses this week?

WEEK TWO SUMMARY

This week focused on **character before capacity**, **humility before honor**, and **love as the evidence of growth**. What God is forming inside you now will sustain what He releases later.

WEEK THREE THEME

RENEWED TO REMAIN

God renews us so we don't quit when pressure comes.

DAY 15 – FAITH THAT ENDURES

Formation Statement

I choose to live by faith even when the journey is difficult.

Primary Scripture

 *Hebrews 10:38*

Biblical Context

The writer of Hebrews addresses believers tempted to drift backward under persecution and fatigue. He reminds them that faith is not just belief—it is endurance.

Theological Truth

Faith matures through perseverance, not convenience.

Pastoral Bridge

Many people start strong but struggle to stay faithful when pressure increases. God renews faith not to escape difficulty, but to remain steadfast through it.

Heart Examination

What pressure is challenging my faith right now?

Spiritual Practice

Declare your trust in God out loud today.

Guided Prayer

Lord, strengthen my faith so I do not shrink back. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What helps me remain faithful during difficult seasons?

DAY 16 – RENEWED IN MIND

Formation Statement

I allow God to renew my thinking daily.

Primary Scripture

 *Romans 12:2*

Biblical Context

Paul urges believers to resist being shaped by culture and instead allow God's truth to reshape their inner life. Renewal is ongoing, not one-time.

Theological Truth

Transformation begins with thinking differently.

Pastoral Bridge

Many battles are won or lost in the mind. God renews our thinking so we can live differently, not just feel inspired.

Heart Examination

Which thought patterns need renewal?

Spiritual Practice

Replace one negative thought today with Scripture.

Guided Prayer

Lord, renew my mind with Your truth. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

How will I guard my thought life?

DAY 17 – STRENGTH THROUGH DISCIPLINE

Formation Statement

I grow stronger through spiritual discipline.

Primary Scripture

 *Hebrews 12:11*

Biblical Context

The writer describes discipline as painful in the moment but fruitful over time. God disciplines His children to produce righteousness and peace.

Theological Truth

Discipline is an expression of God's love, not rejection.

Pastoral Bridge

God's discipline is not meant to break you—it's meant to build you. What feels uncomfortable now is producing strength later.

Heart Examination

Where is God inviting me to grow through discipline?

Spiritual Practice

Practice consistency in one spiritual habit today.

Guided Prayer

Lord, help me grow through discipline and not resist it. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

Which discipline strengthens my walk with God?

DAY 18 – GUARDING THE HEART

Formation Statement

I guard my heart because it shapes my life.

Primary Scripture

 *Proverbs 4:23*

Biblical Context

Wisdom literature emphasizes guarding the heart because it is the wellspring of thoughts, actions, and decisions.

Theological Truth

What you allow into your heart eventually shapes how you live.

Pastoral Bridge

Freedom requires boundaries. Guarding your heart protects your peace and preserves your purpose.

Heart Examination

What influences are draining my peace?

Spiritual Practice

Limit exposure to one negative influence today.

Guided Prayer

Lord, help me guard my heart wisely. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What boundaries protect my spiritual health?

DAY 19 – LETTING GO OF THE PAST

Formation Statement

I move forward without carrying yesterday's burdens.

Primary Scripture

 *Philippians 3:13–14*

Biblical Context

Paul, once a persecutor of the church, refuses to let his past define his future. He presses forward in Christ.

Theological Truth

Freedom comes from releasing what God has already redeemed.

Pastoral Bridge

You cannot fully embrace God's future while holding onto yesterday's guilt, pain, or regret. God calls you forward.

Heart Examination

What am I still holding onto that God has forgiven or healed?

Spiritual Practice

Write down what you need to release and pray over it.

Guided Prayer

Lord, help me let go and move forward in freedom. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What helps me remain free from my past?

DAY 20 – WALKING IN TRUE FREEDOM

Formation Statement

I walk daily in the freedom Christ has given me.

Primary Scripture

 *Galatians 5:1*

Biblical Context

Paul reminds believers that Christ freed them not to return to bondage, but to live in liberty grounded in grace.

Theological Truth

Freedom in Christ is maintained through faith and obedience.

Pastoral Bridge

Freedom is not the absence of struggle—it's the presence of grace that empowers obedience.

Heart Examination

Where am I tempted to return to old patterns?

Spiritual Practice

Choose obedience in one area today.

Guided Prayer

Jesus, help me walk in the freedom You've given me. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What keeps me spiritually free?

DAY 21 – GRATEFUL FOR THE JOURNEY

Formation Statement

I choose gratitude as a spiritual discipline.

Primary Scripture

 *1 Thessalonians 5:18*

Biblical Context

Paul encourages gratitude not because circumstances are perfect, but because God is faithful.

Theological Truth

Gratitude shifts focus from lack to trust.

Pastoral Bridge

Thankfulness reminds us that God has been present in every season—both difficult and joyful.

Heart Examination

What has God carried me through that I haven't acknowledged?

Spiritual Practice

List three things you're grateful for today.

Guided Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for Your faithfulness in my journey. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

How does gratitude sustain my faith?

WEEK THREE SUMMARY

This week taught us that **renewal fuels perseverance, discipline strengthens freedom, and gratitude anchors faith**. God renews us not just to survive—but to remain faithful and free.

WEEK FOUR THEME

FORMED TO FINISH

Depth sustains direction. Faithfulness completes the work.

DAY 22 – WALKING IN PURPOSE

Formation Statement

I live intentionally according to God's purpose for my life.

Primary Scripture

 *Ephesians 2:10*

Biblical Context

Paul reminds believers that salvation is not the end of God's work, but the beginning. We are saved **for** good works prepared by God, not to earn grace but to live it out.

Theological Truth

Purpose is divinely assigned, not self-discovered.

Pastoral Bridge

Purpose is not just about what you do—it's about how you live. God's purpose shows up in obedience, faithfulness, and daily surrender, not just big moments.

Heart Examination

Am I living intentionally or simply reacting to life?

Spiritual Practice

Ask God to reveal where He is already working through you.

Guided Prayer

Lord, help me walk intentionally in the purpose You designed for me. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What habits help me live purposefully?

DAY 23 – STEADFAST IN TRIALS

Formation Statement

I remain faithful to God even when life is difficult.

Primary Scripture

 *1 Peter 5:10*

Biblical Context

Peter writes to believers facing persecution, reminding them that suffering is not the end of the story—God Himself restores, confirms, strengthens, and establishes them.

Theological Truth

God uses trials to refine and strengthen faith.

Pastoral Bridge

Trials don't disqualify you—they develop you. God's presence remains even when circumstances are painful.

Heart Examination

How do I respond when trials challenge my faith?

Spiritual Practice

Encourage someone else who may be struggling.

Guided Prayer

Lord, strengthen me through every trial. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What helps me remain steady in hardship?

DAY 24 – PERFECT PEACE

Formation Statement

I trust God to guard my heart with peace.

Primary Scripture

 *Isaiah 26:3*

Biblical Context

Isaiah points to peace as the result of a mind fixed on God—not on circumstances, uncertainty, or fear.

Theological Truth

Peace flows from trust, not control.

Pastoral Bridge

Peace is not the absence of struggle—it's the presence of trust. God's peace guards you even when life feels unstable.

Heart Examination

What distracts my mind from trusting God?

Spiritual Practice

Pause and pray when anxiety arises today.

Guided Prayer

Lord, keep my heart and mind in perfect peace. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

How can I remain mindful of God's presence daily?

DAY 25 – A LIFE OF WORSHIP

Formation Statement

I worship God through how I live each day.

Primary Scripture

 *Romans 12:1*

Biblical Context

Paul calls believers to present their lives as living sacrifices, emphasizing that worship extends beyond music into daily obedience.

Theological Truth

Worship is a lifestyle, not a moment.

Pastoral Bridge

Every act of obedience becomes worship when offered to God. How you live matters as much as what you say.

Heart Examination

Does my daily life reflect worship to God?

Spiritual Practice

Offer gratitude and praise throughout the day.

Guided Prayer

Lord, receive my life as worship. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What daily actions can become worship?

DAY 26 – FINISHING WELL

Formation Statement

I commit to finishing what God has started in me.

Primary Scripture

 *2 Timothy 4:7*

Biblical Context

Paul, near the end of his life, reflects on his faithfulness. His testimony reminds us that **how we finish matters as much as how we begin**.

Theological Truth

Faithfulness over time honors God.

Pastoral Bridge

God is not only concerned with strong starts—He desires faithful finishes. Perseverance is evidence of maturity.

Heart Examination

Where do I need renewed commitment?

Spiritual Practice

Recommit to a spiritual discipline you've neglected.

Guided Prayer

Lord, give me endurance to finish well. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What helps me remain faithful long-term?

DAY 27 – LIVING AS LIGHT

Formation Statement

I allow God's light to shine through my life.

Primary Scripture

 *Matthew 5:16*

Biblical Context

Jesus calls His followers to live visibly different lives—not for attention, but so others may glorify God.

Theological Truth

A transformed life points others to God.

Pastoral Bridge

Your life communicates the gospel daily. Faith lived out authentically speaks louder than words alone.

Heart Examination

What does my life communicate about God?

Spiritual Practice

Show kindness intentionally today.

Guided Prayer

Lord, let my life reflect Your light. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

How can my actions glorify God?

DAY 28 – ROOTED & RISING

Formation Statement

I remain rooted in Christ as I continue rising in faith and purpose.

Primary Scripture

 *Psalm 1:1–3*

Biblical Context

The psalmist paints the picture of a life planted near life-giving water—stable, fruitful, and enduring through every season.

Theological Truth

Rooted lives flourish consistently.

Pastoral Bridge

What God has done in you this month is meant to continue beyond February. Depth sustains elevation. Remain rooted.

Heart Examination

What spiritual growth will I carry forward?

Spiritual Practice

Commit to ongoing spiritual growth beyond this month.

Guided Prayer

Lord, keep me rooted in You and rising in faith. Amen.

Rule of Life Prompt

What practices will help me continue growing?